

ENERGIZING PROPERTIES

Higgins, Gault see green future

AN EYE ON BUSINESS

By Rob Varnon
STAFF WRITER

Rick Higgins, founder of the Higgins Group, a residential realty firm in Fairfield County, said he believes the energy efficiency of a house will determine how it's sold in the future.

"In the past, people have always asked, 'What are the taxes?'" Higgins said. "I think we're going to come into a time when people are going to ask, 'What are the taxes and what are the heating costs?'"

To prepare for that day, he's having Westport-based Gault Inc., a heating, ventilation and air-conditioning company, perform energy audits on the homes of Higgins Group employees to learn what buyers and sellers should be looking for to improve energy efficiency.

A test run of the audits was performed at Higgins' mother's house in Fairfield.

Gault's auditor found that the exhaust pipe for the home's furnace had rusted off and was not properly venting carbon monoxide and the dryer vent had been disconnected as well.

"It's very good they found it," Higgins said.

The problems will be corrected, and Higgins said he hopes to use the lessons learned to educate more than 300 Higgins Group real estate agents about energy efficiency. The Fairfield-based firm has 13 offices and is opening its 14th in Trumbull this year.

"Energy efficiency has to be our

future, and if we can lead the world in energy efficiency it could be a good boost for our economy," he said.

For Sam Gault, president of Gault, the relationship made sense.

"It's our goal to educate consumers how to use less energy in their homes and lower their carbon footprint," he said, pointing out one real estate agent can interact with 25 buyers and sellers a year.

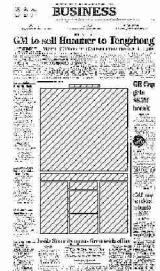
In 2008, Gault sponsored a Polar Bear Empathy Day as part of his efforts to change his family's company from an oil-heat dealer to a conservation company. He said he owes it to his children and future generations to make sure resources are used wisely.

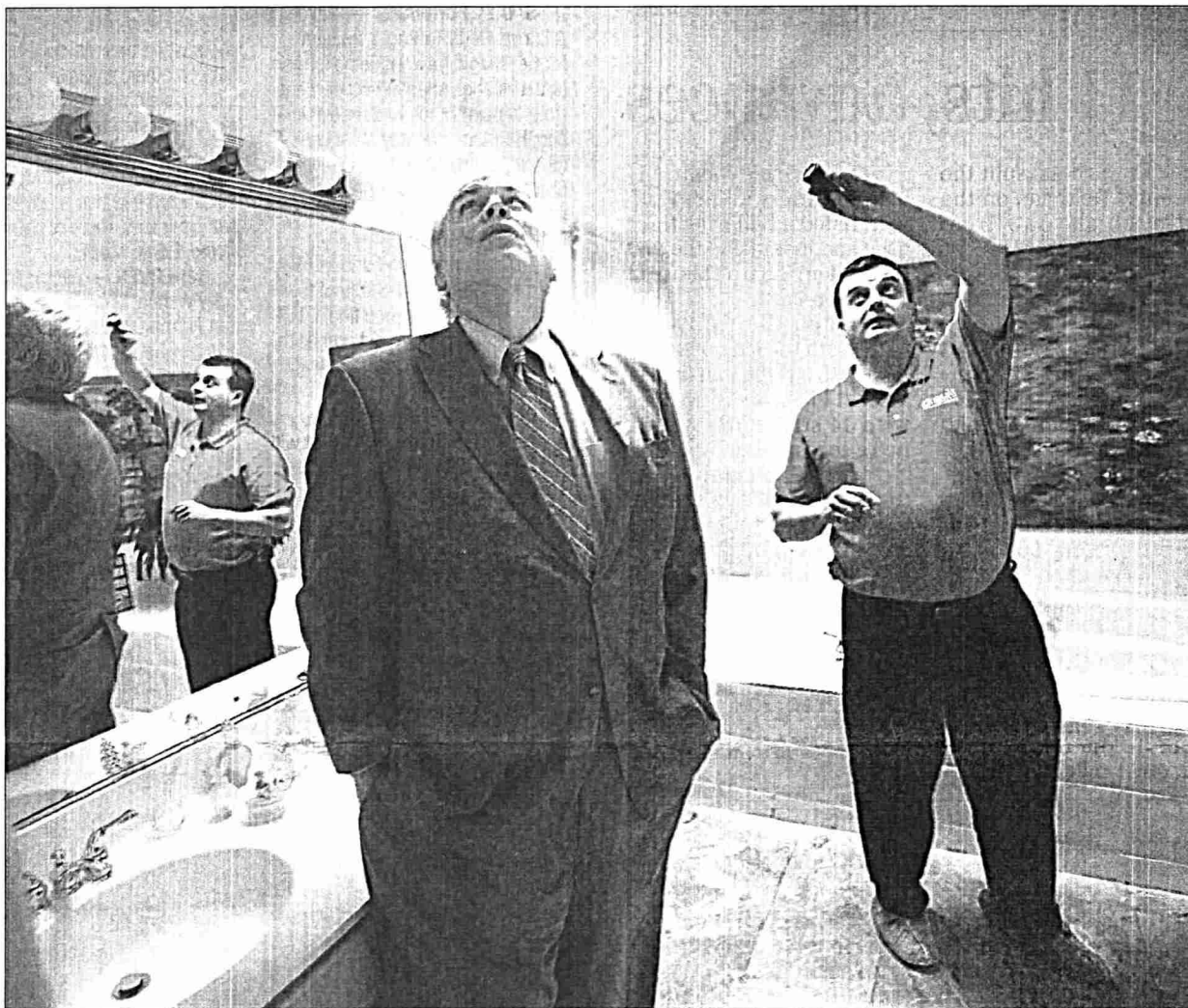
The partnership with the Higgins Group, in which Gault provides a series of free energy audits and educational seminars for the agents, is part of that strategy, Gault said.

Gault, whose firm charges \$89.95 to audit a 2,500-square-foot house, said his company usually finds the biggest energy issues involve a lack of attic and wall insulation. He said after addressing this issue people also can invest in more efficient heating and air conditioners to save money.

A good system can take 30 percent off of a bill, he said. But the initial investment will run more than \$6,000 for a new heating system, Gault said.

— For information on the two companies, visit www.higginsgroup.com or www.gaultinc.com. You also can reach Gault Inc. at 227-5181.





BRIAN A. POUNDS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Rick Higgins, left, founder of the Higgins Group, a residential real estate firm, talks to Jim Baker, an energy consultant with Westport-based Gault Inc., during an assessment of Higgins' mother's home in Fairfield. Gault is partnering with the Higgins Group to provide energy assessments of properties listed by the Fairfield-based realty.